Why is Russian psychology incomprehensible to foreigners?

George Kennan, the American ambassador to Russia in 1954, considered Russia to be the antithesis of the West, since Russian culture is a culture of extremes: "The instinctive reaction of Westerners is to correct, smooth out contradictions, create balance, find a happy medium in which all elements are balanced, where equilibrium is created between diverse forces and interests. For Russians, there are only extremes, a constant imbalance of conflicting forces."

Chaadaev: "Of course, I despise my homeland, but I am annoyed when a foreigner shares this feeling with me."

Selfless love, the rejection of the rest of the world in the name of Great Russia, is combined in the Russian soul with self-deprecation and contempt for others.

At the same time, many foreigners who visited Russia were charmed by the spontaneous humanity of the Russians, the richness of their inner life, in contrast to the flat pragmatism of Westerners.

For Russians, basic humanity is more important than all the achievements of technology, economics, and culture. For them, the depth of inner life is more important than all social institutions.

Stephen Graham, an English anthropologist who walked across the European part of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century:

"For Russians, life is a secret mystery. For the West, life is a straight corridor; for Russians, it is a labyrinth. For the West, life is a military march along the well-trodden road of progress. For Russians, life is a complex pirouette of mystical choreography."

At the same time, the Russian character has an eternal mystical reaction against any culture, against the personal principle, against the rights and dignity of the individual.

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Nikolai Berdyaev saw these traits of the Russian character as the key to explaining the development of Russian history. Russians do not want to take responsibility for their lives and their well-being; they entrust it to

the state and blame the authorities for all their misfortunes.

"Life in the world" and anarchic individualism are combined with the need for a strong state capable of restraining the uncontrollable elements of popular life—all these qualities are explained by Orthodox Christianity, which permeates all aspects of Russian life, regardless of whether a person is a believer or an atheist.

The idea of Orthodox Christianity is the idea of Absolute Universal Truth, which opposes the Western idea of a multiplicity of opinions, Western pluralism, and rationalism as an instrument of knowledge.

In Protestantism, there are 250 denominations, 250 interpretations of the Old and New Testaments. In Orthodoxy, there is only one Truth, which rejects all other interpretations of the Holy Scriptures.

Truth belongs to everyone and no one. Since it belongs to no one and at the same time to everyone, each individual opinion insists on its right to be universal. Everyone, feeling themselves to be the bearer of the One Truth, must destroy all other positions that cannot

be the Truth. Everyone's right to the Truth gives everyone a mandate to commit any violence against others. To protect the truth from the encroachments of millions, force is needed, Absolute Force, a state with total power over all spheres of life.

"The fact that all population groups during the Stalinist period, without exception, were victims of terror gave the terror a tinge of retribution for the evil in the world, which lurked in everyone and waited for its hour...Millions of people took part in the mass repressions that affected millions more, with the same people often playing the role of both executioners and victims. The repressions were a manifestation of the self-activity of the broad masses of the population." Alexander Zinoviev

The Soviet era achieved mass support by granting the entire society, all strata of the population, the right to violence against everyone. The democratization of violence was the ironclad foundation of stability in Stalinist Russia.

Not only did millions of ordinary people become victims of mass terror, but the perpetrators of terror themselves were also victims. Many leaders of the Communist Party who carried out terror were shot, and those who managed to survive lived in fear of arrest, deportation, or execution.

The totalitarianism of Soviet power had its roots in the peasant world, where no one had clearly defined rights and where the community had unlimited power over the life and well-being of each individual member. The need for strong, unrestricted power led to the acceptance of violence by the authorities over the individual in any form.

This phenomenon is explained by a real story described in the St. Petersburg News of the 1860s.

In the spring in St. Petersburg, the ice on the Neva River began to melt, and it became dangerous to cross the ice to the other side. The governor ordered a police post to be set up on the shore to stop anyone who tried to walk on the fragile ice. A craftsman began to cross the Neva despite the cries of the policeman. Soon the ice cracked and the

craftsman began to drown. The policeman ran up and managed to pull him, unconscious, onto the shore.

When he came to, he began to scold the policeman: "Why aren't you doing your job?" "How am I not doing my job? I shouted at you to stop, you'll fall through. Craftsman: "Shouted? You should have hit me on the head with a stick."

In Western countries, the state serves society. Everyone has civil rights. Power is limited by a social contract. At each stage of social development, the rights of the lower classes were expanded and the social contract was revised.

In Russia, civil rights existed only on paper, and there was never a social contract. The social contract was replaced by a war for power. At all levels, in politics, economics, and culture. Those who had more power in any form received greater privileges and access to greater material goods. Anyone could be in power at any given moment, and anyone could be a potential victim of that power.

"All groups of the population, without exception, were victims of terror during the Stalinist period. Millions of ordinary people took part in the mass repressions, in which millions of other ordinary people suffered. The same people often played the role of both executioners and victims. The repressions were a manifestation of the self-activity of the broad masses." Alexander Zinoviev

Social equality and social justice, thus, were achieved through the equal distribution of violence across all population groups.

The modern Russian mentality bears the traits of an archaic peasant community. Truth belongs to the people (folk truth), i.e., it belongs to everyone and no one in particular. The land should belong to everyone and no one in particular. All power should belong to one person—the prince, the tsar, the khan, the leader of the Communist Party. In this system, only the duties of the individual are clearly defined. His rights are the right to submit to power.

In this system, legal laws have no real power, and without them, the authorities are unable to control the processes taking place in

society. Everything happens spontaneously; it is a free play of the will of millions.

Each individual, feeling himself to be the bearer of the only correct truth, rejects all other positions and opinions, which cannot be true. Hence the anarchic call to Will that always smolders in the soul of the people – the right of everyone to Truth, the mandate of everyone to any violence against others – is false.

In Western society, dialogue between equals prevails. In Russian society, there is no dialogue, only debate, the goal of which is to crush any other opinion, thought, or idea. In debate, any means are acceptable. "If the enemy does not surrender, he is destroyed."

When the power of the prince, tsar, khan, or Communist Party leader weakened, there was a surge of anarchism, a war of the lower classes against the upper classes in the form of peasant revolts, revolutions, civil war, mass repression, or the chaos of a period of radical social reform.

The main reason for the Russian lawlessness was the absence of established mechanisms of economic relations; economic competition

was replaced by competition in the struggle for power in various forms.

Russian society still perceives this as the norm, rooted in the Orthodox dogma *of "power from God."*

Western Catholicism and Protestantism put forward saints and heroes, fighters for truth, justice, and goodness. Russian saints were the poor, the destitute, the humiliated, and the insulted. The church thus legalized dualism—violence by all against all and suffering from violence as an organic form of existence.

For centuries, the Orthodox Church has called for humility before any power, cultivating suffering and self-abasement as the highest virtues, and serving Power itself.

The dualism of the Russian paradigm—**violence and suffering—an organic whole,** was incomprehensible to foreigners, but even Russians themselves did not understand it, since a rational approach was unacceptable to them.

"Russia cannot be understood with the mind; one can only believe in Russia." Tyutchev.

Westerners strive to understand the world in which they live by analyzing facts, while Russians refuse to analyze or understand.

The West uses linear logic to understand the three-dimensional world. In order for the logical system to be sufficiently coherent, it shields it from real contradictions and finds itself in an artificial capsule separating it from complex three-dimensional reality.

Russians, on the other hand, live within organic contradictions, within the phantasmagoria of real life. Rationalism and abstract logic are unacceptable to them.

Westerners see trees and do not see the forest. Russians see the forest and do not see the trees. Russians do not see details because they do not want to analyze, i.e., divide things into parts.

"Russians want to get everything at once and understand everything at once. And if that is impossible, they do nothing and have nothing." Walter Schubart

"If we assume that life is governed by reason, then the very possibility of life is destroyed." Leo Tolstoy

"... it seems to me that Russian thought is sick with fear of itself, strives to be irrational, it is afraid of reason." Maxim Gorky.

Leonov, Soviet playwright, in the words of one of the characters in the play "The Thief": "Thought is the source of suffering. Whoever destroys thought will be exalted in the memory of mankind."

It would seem that industrialization, modern technology, and accumulated technical knowledge, and thanks to them, a general improvement in life, should have changed Russians' attitude toward rationalism and logical thinking. But this did not happen.

"The Russian mentality is not based on common sense. It has nothing to do with common sense. A person who uses rationalism and dry logic is perceived negatively. He cannot be a good person." Tatyana Tolstaya, writer.

Rationalism operates with facts, reliable, verified information, and connects them in a

logical chain. It clearly distinguishes between right and wrong behavior, actions, business and non-business decisions. In the Russian mentality, right and wrong, reality and fantasy form a single whole. What is right and what is wrong is determined by the person himself.

"Russians have no respect for facts. The accuracy of facts is of no value to them. They are always ready to overturn any facts and evidence. The most serious Russian thinkers or Russian lawmakers can start a discussion about where Java, Borneo, or Madagascar are located without having any idea of their location. They freely relocate entire countries or cities wherever their boundless imagination takes them." Dillon, St. Petersburg correspondent for the Daily Telegraph newspaper, who lived in Russia for 20 years, from 1870 to 1890.

The slogan "When the enemy does not surrender, he is destroyed" is a paraphrase of the Russian Orthodox doctrine of Pravda.

Vyazemsky in a letter to Turgenev:

"You can love Russia like a whore, whom you love with all her faults and vices, but you cannot love her like a wife, because love for a wife must be mixed with respect, and you cannot respect the real Russia."